MEANING OF NYARAI SALIBUTAN ECOTOURISM IN ENVIRONMENTAL COMMUNICATION

MIRA HASTI HASMIRA[1]*, ERI BARLIAN[2] AND ALDRI FRINALDI[3]

[1]Department of Sociology, Universitas Negeri Padang, Indonesia. [2]Department of Coaching, Universitas Negeri Padang, Indonesia. [3]Department of Public Administration, Universitas Negeri Padang, Indonesia.

*Corresponding author: mirahasti@fis.unp.ac.id

Abstract: This study evaluates the meaning of *Nyarai* Salibutan ecotourism as the main message in environmental communication. This is a qualitative study with a hermeneutic-oriented approach, which is later known as the interpretive approach. Data was collected through observation, in-depth interviews and documentation studies.. The location of the study was in Nagari Salibutan, Lubuk Alung Sub-district, Padang Pariaman Regency, West Sumatra Province, Indonesia. The results showed that there were four groups of meaning for environmental components by society: (1) meaning based on previous stories; (2) meaning based on reality; (3) meaning based on value systems, and (4) meaning based on government policies. Based on the interpretative analysis, the meaning given by society to the *Nyarai* Ecotourism area is as a cultural symbol. This meaning is based on the cognitive, evaluative and symbolic systems in society. This observation is further examined with the theory of cultural ecology, that over time the meaning given by society is by the existing ecological wisdom with the government's policy of making this area an ecotourism realm, changing the meaning of the society into a tourism meaning.

Keywords: *Nyarai* salibutan, environmental communication, message, ecotourism.

Introduction

Communication must be seen not only as one of the supporting elements for environmental management but also integral to the effort.. Without it, all environmental efforts will be threatened. Carvalho (2009) states that communication plays a central role in shaping our understanding of nature and the role of humans in it. Environmental problems are not only related to its destruction but also related to its utilization by society. Ecotourism is one of the interesting studies in this regard.

In recent years, much attention has been paid to eco-tourism because of its environmental conservation potential. Ecotourism is one of the most popular and fastest-growing segment of tourism. There are no reliable statistics on the number of nature tourists and the growth of ecotourism, but it is growing faster than mainstream tourism (Makian & Hanifezadeh, 2021). Ecotourism can channel tourism revenue to support nature reserves and provide alternative sources of income for local communities so that they can reduce their dependence on the exploitation of wildlife and natural ecosystems. In addition, ecotourism can help transmit traditional ecological knowledge and raise public awareness of the environmental crisis in marginal areas of the world (Li *et al*., 2022). This can be realized through good communication between tour guides and eco-tourists.

Sumardjo (2014) states that communication is the process of conveying messages between humans. The message can be a person's thoughts or feelings towards another person by using language as a tool. The purpose of communication is to change behavior (cognitive, affective, and psychomotor) so that there is a common meaning of an object or condition between the parties.

Communication can build, develop and change human opinions, perceptions, and views about concepts in resource and environmental management (Newell *et al*., 2005). Environmental communication expert, Cox (2013) said that

environmental communication is a pragmatic and constitutive means of providing an understanding of the environment to the public. Cox (2013) gave an example of the relationship between humans and nature, which is a medium for understanding environmental issues and environmental protection (Fahmi, 2019). Martín-de Castro *et al* (2016) and Ki *et al* (2022) state that environmental communication is defined as "The relationship between communication practices and environmental affairs". Many cases show that e proper application of communication science can prevent problems in society. Therefore, this research is necessary to assist tour guides properly communicate the *Nyarai* ecotourism environment to eco-tourists.

Buergelt & Paton (2014) explain that communication can build, develop, and change human opinions, opinions, perceptions, and views about concepts in resources and environmental management; develop a positive attitude towards the development of human ecology and develop human behaviour in line with the latest principles of human ecology. According to Wesley *et al* (2017), the most important soft skill in tourism is communication. Ecotourism actors, especially tour guides as communicators, need to provide meaning about the *Nyarai* ecotourism environment and then communicate to ecotourists so they can then understand what kind of ecotourism they are aiming for so that developing an area into an ecotourism location can be realized. To provide this meaning, local wisdom is an important component to protecting an environment. Yenrizal (2017) states that local wisdom to protect the environment in each region is one of the roles of environmental communication.

To better understand, conceptualize and achieve the multidimensional concept of communication skills, this paper aims to investigate the literature and propose a measurement scale adapted to the modern tourism workplace (Cuic Tankovic *et al*., 2022). Perceptions about the environment are largely determined by the cultural context, vision, lifestyle, and value judgments obtained through communication, according to the Working Paper of the Working Party on Development Cooperation and Environment, 1999 page 8 (Oepen & Hamacher, 1999). To develop an effective environmental message, communicators need to outline objectives, identify stakeholders, define key messages, and identify communication methods to disseminate information (Reynolds *et al*., 2015). Developing environmental messages, of course, is closely related to the ecological wisdom of the local society. Aswita *et al* (2018) explain that ecological wisdom is ecological intelligence is a traditional society's understanding of the carrying capacity of nature which is manifested in concrete actions to protect the environment in which they live (sustainability).

The Regulation of the Minister of Home Affairs Number 33/2009 concerning "Guidelines for the Development of Ecotourism in the Regions, in West Sumatra" lists several very attractive ecotourism locations. One of them is the *Nyarai* Salibutan Ecotourism, which is a type of forest ecotourism, namely in the Gamaran Forest area. This ecotourism has been open to tourists since 2013. Recently, this ecotourism location was one of the 75 best tourist villages in the 2023 Best Indonesian Tourism Village Award by the Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy.

With the opening of the Gamaran Forest eco-tourism area, the local community has new livelihoods, including as tour guided. Of the 27 tour guides registered with the LA Adventure POKDARWIS (Tourism Awareness Group) that manage this area, none of them communicated to the research team about the ecotourism attractions in the *Nyarai* Salibutan area. They just show the way and only answer if asked. Before the trip started, the guide only explained that the *Nyarai* Waterfall was approximately 5.5 km from the location of the post. As stated by an ecotourist named Andri (25 years, March 12, 2022, 17 00 WIB), all the way to *Nyarai* Waterfall, the guide was just silent. Contrary to what was written (Perera, 2022), just walking in forests or natural areas is not ecotourism.

When we arrived at a location where there were banners, the guide stopped and told us to look around. Ecotourism prioritizes education of ecotourists. Rawat (2022) defines ecotourism as responsible visits to protected natural areas, promoting the welfare of local communities and education for tourists. In this case, the education component would be fulfilled by the explanation given by the guide to eco-tourists. Besides educating tourists, ecotourism also boosts the local community's economy. As Wiratno wrote, the alternative income that communities earn from ecotourism is an effective way to protect natural parks from illegal activities (Wiratno *et al*., 2022). Ecotourism can generate tourism revenues to support nature reserves and provide alternative sources of income for local communities to reduce their dependence on the exploitation of wildlife and natural ecosystems. In addition, ecotourism can help transmit traditional ecological knowledge and increase public awareness of the crisis environment in marginal regions of the world (Li *et al*., 2022). This can be realized through good communication between tour guides and eco-tourists. Sumardjo (2014) states that, in essence, communication is the process of conveying messages between humans. By using language, the message can be a person's thoughts or feelings toward another person. The purpose of communication is to change behaviour (cognitive, affective, and psychomotor) so that there is a common meaning of an object or condition between the parties communicating.

Therefore, in this article, the authors focus on the meaning of the environmental components of the *Nyarai* ecotourism to the local community. This meaning is the ecological wisdom of the local community. This message will then be used in effective environmental communication by ecotourism *Nyarai guide*. With this message, it is hoped that ecotourism guides can convey ecotourism educational messages to ecotourists in a better and more structured manner.

Methods

This research was conducted through a qualitative approach because it allows researchers to obtain a holistic view of the field. The emphasis is on a phenomenon's interpretive aspects (Miles & Huberman, 1994). This research uses a hermeneutic-oriented approach, later known as the interpretive approach. The breakthrough of Geertz's interpretive method can be summarized in two ways. First, interpretation must be based on a "thick description" of social phenomena or events. Second, the goal of interpretation is to find and understand the views, beliefs, and explanations of social actors from their perspective. This goal can only be achieved if the researcher establishes a close relationship with the society he is studying (Titchkosky, 2015). With this interpretive approach, Geertz sees culture as a system of meaning that must be understood semiotically, namely as webs of significance or patterns of meaning manifested as symbols so that an analysis of them must be interpretive, namely to explore and discover meaning behind what people do, and the significance of their rituals, structures, and beliefs for all life and thought (Pals, 2006).

Researchers seek to find and evaluate how the people of *Nagari* Salibutan interpret and understand the environment of the Gamaran forest in their area, which is then opened and developed into an ecotourism location. This research focuses on exploring the meaning *Nagari* Salibutan society assigns to environmental components through an interpretive approach which is one of the qualitative studies. Researchers found that the society assigned abiotic, biotic, and cultural meanings to their environment.

The research location was the *Nagari* Salibutan, Lubuk Alung. This location was chosen because *Nyarai* Salibutan is the first *Nagari* Forest area in West Sumatra to be managed as an ecotourism area. Based on social forestry business development data from the West Sumatra Provincial Forestry Service, as

Figure 1: *Nyarai* Salibutan waterfall in the region of Gamaran forest - Lubuk Alung

of May 2020 4 locations utilized forests as ecotourism: y *Nyarai* Salibutan Ecotourism, which opened in 2014, is the oldest, followed by Ranah Pantai Cermin Ecotourism which opened in 2017, Harau Ecotourism which also opened in 2017 and Padang VII Ecotourism which opened in 2018. *Nyarai* Salibutan was opened independently by the people in 2013 but only managed to get permits in 2014. A license from the *Nagari* Forest Management Rights (NFMR) body designated the Nyarai as an ecotourism area, meaning that it lowered its status from a protected forest to a *Nagari* forest.

Informants in this study were selected using a purposive sampling technique. According to Sugiyono (2018), purposive sampling has certain considerations for selecting the informants. 1) 12 people from *Nagari*; 2) 2 people from *Nyarai* Tourism Manager (POKDARWIS LA Adventure); 3) 1 person from the Agency of *Nagari* Forest Management; 4) 1 person from Wali of *Nagari* Salibutan; 5) 2 people from Kapalo Mudo *Nagari* Salibutan, 6) 10 people ecotourists; 7) 1 Forestry Extension Officer; and 8) 1 Forestry Office of West Sumatra. The total number of informants in this study was 30 people. The names of the informants have been changed to protect their privacy.

The analysis of data from interviews and observations was carried out continuously since the start of the study. Data and findings that are considered important are immediately tested through further data collection, especially in certain cases. Data processing is carried out using coding, through the Open coding stage, immediately after collection. Focusing on data and determining code labels for themes in axial coding is when the researcher begins to organize a series of initial codes or previous concepts by questioning causation, conditions and interactions, strategies and processes, and looking for categories or concepts that can be grouped (Mohajan & Mohajan, 2022). Then, selective coding stage is carried out on the collected data and code.

Results

 Four (4) groups of meanings were given by e society regarding the environmental components of *Nyarai* Ecotourism: (1) meaning based on previous stories; (2) meaning based on existing reality; (3) meaning based on the value system in society; and (4) meaning due to government policies that turn forest areas into ecotourism areas. This article will further describe the meaning based on the value system of the local society. Each meaning will be explained in a different article. Society understands and obeys the rules when entering a forest area. These rules have strict customary sanctions, as explained in more detail in Table 1.

Table 1: Ecological wisdom and the meaning based on the value system understood by local society

No	Ecological Wisdom	The Meaning Based on a Value System Understood by Local Society
1	Does not damage the forest ecosystem	Based on the results of an interview with Husein (48 years) stated that anyone who wants to enter the *Nyarai* area is not permitted to damage the ecosystem in the *Nyarai* tourist area. If proven detrimental, customary sanctions will be given in the form of material fines.
2.	Maintain behaviour while in the forest	Based on an interview with Ema (39 years) stated that in the *Nyarai* area, e no bathing naked, no shouting, and no carrying out anything that is in the *Nyarai is allowed*. The *Nyarai* is in the middle of a forest, so it's not just humans in the forest, as there are many other creatures. Mrs Ani (24 years). said that if you enter the forest area in *Nyarai*, you must follow the rules, because there are many types of animals in the forest. Especially tigers which will be annoyed if disturbed by humans who don't follow the rules. Tourists who do not have good intentions, such as bathing naked, talking carelessly, and being alone with *non-muhrim*, will receive a reprimand from nature.
3.	Rules about catching birds	Yudi (30 years) stated that in this area it is not permitted to shoot or trap birds. Those caught will be given customary sanctions, usually in the form of monetary fines. Sunardi (56 years), stated that it is not permissible to shoot birds indiscriminately in the Nyarai, as they are are a protected. Local residents understand that it is not allowed to shoot birds. However, people who are not local to the are usually have to be informed of the rules before they enter the Nyarai area.
4.	Rules for collecting goods in forest areas.	There was once a case of tourists taking stones to make ring stones around the *Nyarai* waterfall and then taking them home. The tourists were warned in a dream to return the stones. This indicates that *Nyarai* tourism has its taboos. The myths that exist in the *Nyarai* waterfall are not much different from other areas. Those who have bad intentions will suffer bad consequences. However, *Nyarai* tourism is quite friendly for visitors, such as being able to pick fruit or catch fish.

It can be seen that any meaning given by the local community to environmental components in the *Nyarai* area is always accompanied by sanctions. This is generally done because they want to protect the ecosystem through community wisdom. From the theory of symbolic interpretation by Clifford Geertz (Shweder, 2010) we can surmise that the meaning given by the local community regarding environmental components in the *Nyarai* area is an interpretive view of culture as a system of inherited conceptions (from previous generations) and expressed in symbolic terms with the help of human culture communicating, preserving and developing knowledge and attitudes towards life.

The meaning given by the local community regarding environmental components in the *Nyarai* Salibutan area can be interpreted as culture. As explained by Geertz (2008), the concept of culture is a historically transmitted pattern of meaning embodied in symbols, an inherited system of concepts expressed in symbolic forms by which humans communicate, preserve, and develop their knowledge of life According to Geertz (2008), the cognitive system or knowledge system in culture is a form of representation of existing realities, such as the map of the island of Sumatra which is a model of the island of *Andalusia*. The structure in the cognitive system shows how the shape of the symbol structure is adapted to the original or physical structure. Geertz (1992) gives an example that understanding the culture of a society is showing its fairness without narrowing down its specificity.

Figure 2: Prohibition on catching fish species such as *gariang, long, kulari, mungkuh*, and *basi* in Gamaran Forest

The evaluative system or cultural value system is also called the model, this model does not represent an existing reality, but a reality that must be formed or realized. The meeting point between the two existing systems (cognitive and evaluative) made possible by this symbol is called the system of meaning. Through meaning an intermediary, symbols can translate knowledge into values, and can also translate a set of values into a knowledge system (Rosidah, 2011). Symbols or signs can be seen as concepts that are considered by humans as characteristics of something that has a logical-analytic nature or through associations in thoughts or facts. A symbol is an object that has meaning by the reality of human life so that the meaning is indirectly given by the man himself. So, what forms a religious system is a series of sacred symbols that are intertwined into an orderly unit, the types of symbols that are seen by society as something very sacred are very diverse, but the sacred symbols that are staged not only have positive value but also negative value. These symbols not only indicate the existence of good but also indicate the existence of evil (Geertz, 1992).

Symbols can be objects, events, sounds or voices, and writings or sculptural images formed and given meaning by humans. Symbols or signs can be seen as concepts that have characteristics that contain the quality of logical analysis or through the association of thoughts and facts (Sudikan, 2007). It can be understood in this case that symbols carry messages that contain meanings that encourage one's thoughts and actions. Through meaning as an intermediary, symbols can translate knowledge into values, and can also translate a set of values into a knowledge system. Symbols are objects that have meaning in the reality of human life.

Each culture has a core that is directly related to its adaptation to the environment. The essence of culture is the division of labour or the model of organizing work in society, the number of inhabitants and their reproduction, as well as the mechanisms for regulating settlements and residences. Cultural ecology explains how human populations adapt to environmental conditions by focusing on behaviour at the core of culture, which considers how religious systems, social values, knowledge and technology systems, political styles, kinship systems, and several other factors influence ways of life. In other words, a society that ultimately allows them to adapt to their environment. Sutton and Anderson (2020); Putra *et al* (2023) state that the cultural ecology approach is to understand the environment as something separate from culture. Both culture and the environment are in a holistic whole in a dialectical process that influences or "causes each other". Two important ideas included

in the concept of "mutual causation" are that environment and culture are not something that simply exists as two ontologically separate things, or as an independent order and the active role of the environment in collective cultural forms and changes.

Based on research conducted, before changes were made to make community forests ecotourism locations, forests were places where people made a living, one of which was by utilizing forest products. Even the existing ecotourism guide used to work as an illegal logger. From there we can see that humans adapt to changes in their environment. The customs that exist in the community continue as usual, without any changes since the entry of ecotourists to their area of residence. From the meaning given by the community to the environmental components in the *Nyarai* Ecotourism area, based on the values understood by the community, it can be surmised that in ecotourism activities, which are communicative events, this meaning can be conveyed by tour guides as messages in environmental communication to eco-tourists.

Conclusion

It can be concluded that the environmental component of *Nyarai* ecotourism can be based on the values shared by the local community.

This is what is called ecological wisdom. Implementation of this understanding is one of the efforts to protect the ecosystem. This meaning can be conveyed by tour guides as one of the messages in environmental communication to ecotourists.

Acknowledgements

References

Aswita, D., Suryadarma, I. G. P., & Suyanto, S. (2018). Local wisdom of Sabang Island society (Aceh, Indonesia) in building ecological intelligence to support sustainable tourism. *Geo Journal of Tourism and Geosites*, *22*(2), 393-402.

Buergelt, P. T., & Paton, D. (2014). An ecological risk management and capacity building model. *Human Ecology*, *42*, 591-603.

Carvalho, P. A. (2009). *Communication for sustainable policy: Connecting science, society, and government*. *17*.

Figure 3: The distance signs point to Nyarai Salibutan Waterfall

Cox, J. R. (2013). *Environmental communication and the public sphere* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, Calif.: SAGE Publications.

Cuic Tankovic, A., Kapeš, J., & Benazić, D. (2022). Measuring the importance of communication skills in tourism. *Economic Research-EkonomskaIstrazivanja*, 36(1), 460-479. http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/1331677X.2022.2077790

Fahmi, F. (2019). Komunikasi lingkungan dalam komunikasi Islam. *Jurnal Peurawi: Media Kajian Komunikasi Islam*, 2(1), 63-76.

Ki, E. J., Shin, S., & Oh, J. (2022). The state of environmental communication research: An analysis of published studies in the communication disciplines. *Journal of Intelligent Communication*, 2(1), 1-12. https://doi.org/10.54963/jic.v2i1.38

Geertz, C. (1992). Common sense as a cultural system. *The Antioch Review*, 50(1/2), 221-241.

Geertz, C. (2008). Thick description: Toward an interpretive theory of culture. In *The Cultural Geography Reader* (pp. 41-51). Routledge.

Li, L., Dong, Y., Zhang, T., Wang, H., Li, H., & Li, A. (2022). Environmental and social outcomes of ecotourism in the dry rangelands of China. *Journal of Ecotourism*, 1-21. https://doi.org/10.1080/14724049.2022.2048841

Makian, S., & Hanifezadeh, F. (2021). Current challenges facing ecotourism development in Iran. *Journal of Tourismology*, 7(1), 123-140.

Martín-de Castro, G., Amores-Salvadó, J., & Navas-López, J. E. (2016). Environmental management systems and firm performance: Improving firm environmental policy through stakeholder engagement. *Corporate Social Responsibility and Environmental Management*, 23(4), 243-256.

Miles, M. B., & Huberman, A. M. Mohajan, D., & Mohajan, H. (2022). Exploration of coding in qualitative data analysis: Grounded theory perspective. *Paradigm Academic Press*, 1(6), 50-60. http://dx.doi.org/10.56397/RAE.2022.12.07

Newell, B., Crumley, C. L., Hassan, N., Lambin, E. F., Pahl-Wostl, C., Underdal, A., & Wasson, R. (2005). A conceptual template for integrative human-environment research. *Global Environmental Change*, 15(4), 299-307.

Oepen, M., & Hamacher, W. (1999). Environmental communication for sustainable development. In Oepen, M., & W. Hamacher (Eds.), *Communicating the environment: Environmental communication for sustainable development* (pp. 32-37). Frankrut: Peter Lang.

Rawat, S. K. (2022). A study on impact of ecotourism on wildlife: Scenario of Sariska National Park. *International Journal of Fauna and Biological Studies*, 9(3), 24–28. https://www.faunajournal.com/archives/2022/vol9issue3/PartA/9-2-27-741.pdf

Reynolds, A., Brown, P., Altinay, Z., & Group, F. (2015, November 8). Best practices in environmental communication - A scientific paper. *FromTheLabBench*. http://www.fromthelabbench.com/from-the-lab-bench-science-blog/2015/11/8/best-practices-in-environmental-communication-a-scientific-paper.

Rosidah, F. U. (2011). Pendekatan Antropologi dalam studi agama. *Religió: JurnalStudi Agama-Agama*, 1(1), 23-32.

Pals, D. L. (2006). *Eight theories of religion* (2nd ed.). Oxford University Press.

Perera, P. K. U. (2022). Community perception of ecotourism in Kanneliya Rainforest area. *Proceedings of the 11th International Conferences on Management and Economics*, 291–302. ICME. http://ir.lib.ruh.ac.lk/bitstream/handle/iruor/7564/1.%20Marketing%2071.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y

Putra, A., Dewata, I., Hermon, D., Barlian, E., & Umar, G. (2023). Sustainable development-based coastal management policy development: A literature review. *Journal of Sustainability Science and Management*, *18*(1), 238-246.

Shweder, R. A. (2010). Clifford Geertz. *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, *154*(1), 87.

Sudikan, S. Y. (2007). *Antropologi Sastra*. Surabaya: Unesa University Press.

Sugiyono. (2018). *Metode Penelitian Kuantitatif, Kualitatif, dan R&D*. Alfabeta CV.

Sumardjo. (2014). *Perspektif Komunikasi Lintas Budaya dalam Pemberdayaan Kelembagaan Mendukung Pertanian Keberlanjutan*. Program Pengelolaan Sumber Daya Alam dan Lingkungan, Sekolah Pascasarjana Institut Pertanian Bogor.

Sutton, M. Q., & Anderson, E. N. (2020). *Introduction to cultural ecology*. Routledge.

Titchkosky, T. (2015). Life with dead metaphors: Impairment rhetoric in social justice praxis. *Journal of Literary & Cultural Disability Studies*, *9*(1), 1-18.

Yanchar, S. C. (2015). Truth and disclosure in qualitative research: Implications of hermeneutic realism. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, *12*(2), 107-124.

Yenrizal. (2017). *Lestarikan Bumi dengan Komunikasi Lingkungan*. Deeppublish.

Wesley, S. C., Jackson, V. P., & Lee, M. (2017). The perceived importance of core soft skills between retailing and tourism management students, faculty, and businesses. *Employee Relations*, *39*(1), 79-99.

Wiratno, W., Withaningsih, S., Gunawan, B., & Iskandar, J. (2022). Ecotourism as a resource sharing strategy: Case study of community-based ecotourism at the Tangkahan Buffer Zone of Leuser National Park, Langkat District, North Sumatra, Indonesia. *Sustainability (Switzerland)*, *14*(6), 3399. http://dx.doi.org/10.3390/su14063399